



MARKETING

Why APAC marketers aren't cutting budgets despite economic uncertainty

Years of navigating economic uncertainty across the region have taught APAC marketers to stay agile during volatile times.

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Cost cutting may seem like an unavoidable outcome in times of prolonged economic uncertainty, but that isn't how APAC marketers see it.

Geopolitical tensions and AI-driven disruption notwithstanding, APAC marketers aren't hastily retreating with their ad budgets. Instead, experts say they are responding by rapidly reallocating spend.

Recent data also suggests APAC marketers tend to hold the line during times of high volatility. Dentsu's latest global advertising forecast expects APAC ad spend to grow 5.9% in 2026, making it the fastest-growing advertising region globally despite ongoing macroeconomic headwinds.

"When the macro-environment tightens, the knee-jerk reaction in North America and Europe is almost always defensive — protect the bottom line by freezing budgets and cutting brand investment first, before trickling down into performance," Darren Woolley, CEO of TrinityP3, told The Current. "In APAC, the playbook is different. Marketers here rarely default to flat-out cutting."

Instead, APAC marketers tend to react with "high-velocity reallocation," Woolley said.

"While a European CMO is auditing their agency contracts to find savings, an APAC marketer is already doubling down on livestream commerce and hyper-targeted contextual ads to capture immediate demand."

According to Valerie Phang, APAC marketing lead at DT (formerly Digital Turbine), APAC marketers' willingness to embrace new approaches during times of uncertainty is driven by the region's unique dynamics.

"With the diversity of consumers across the region and the pace at which conditions shift, APAC marketers are constantly being forced to challenge assumptions around channel saturation, platform loyalty and audience behavior," she said. "That pressure is uncomfortable, but it is also why APAC marketers tend to have a real appetite for testing new solutions and measuring effectiveness in new ways."

Built for uncertainty

Years of navigating currency fluctuations and regulatory shifts across the region have meant that APAC marketers experience macro-uncertainty differently than their counterparts in Europe and North America.

"The perception that APAC marketers possess a different psychological approach to volatility is accurate," Woolley said. "They don't wait for the storm to pass because they know another one is right behind it."

As a result, making the wrong decision isn't necessarily the biggest risk. According to Woolley, the bigger risk is moving too slowly.

"If a campaign isn't converting within 48 hours, it is killed and the investment is reassigned," he said. "[APAC marketers] are more comfortable risking small amounts of capital across dozens of micro-campaigns rather than betting the house on a single, massive, unproven brand narrative."

Céline Gauthier-Darnis, executive vice president of APAC and MENA at Equativ, agrees.

"It is less about risk aversion and more about speed," she said. "Long-term, multi-month rigid planning cycles are effectively fading. Marketers are building agile, flexible strategies that allow them to pull back, push forward or entirely pivot a campaign within hours rather than weeks."

Structural advantages

The region's fragmentation is another major reason why APAC's response to uncertainty often differs from that of Western markets.

As APAC's economic significance continues to grow, navigating complexity is increasingly important for advertisers. According to a [2025 report](#) from Bain & Company, Asia-Pacific is expected to surpass North America as the world's largest consumption region by 2035.

"Brands can't rely on a single regional strategy across markets at very different stages of development, which builds an inherent agility that proves valuable in uncertain times," Gauthier-Darnis said.

Added to these structural advantages is the region's mobile-first infrastructure. Woolley points to platforms such as WeChat, Grab, GoTo and Line that combine content and commerce within a single ecosystem.

"When your region's commerce is inherently social, mobile-first and data-rich, your response to inflation or supply chain friction is naturally more fluid than a market reliant on traditional retail legacy systems," he said.

Performance branding

Doubling down during uncertain times is not just theoretically successful. Research highlighted by WARC found that brands across regions that [maintained or increased](#) marketing investment during periods of economic pressure were more likely to improve return on investment and incremental sales than those that cut spending.

According to Woolley, the strongest performers in APAC during times of uncertainty are combining brand building and performance marketing with culturally relevant video and social content that creates brand equity while also driving immediate transactions. He describes the approach as "performance branding." Marketers outperforming in the current environment are also actively prioritizing on-the-go measurement "as a live operational input rather than a post-campaign report," Phang said.

"In previous downturns, the instinct to cut brand spend was partly driven by the inability to prove its contribution in-quarter. Today, marketers who have invested in measurement infrastructure can show exactly what is affected when spending stops and that makes defending budgets far easier."

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